

Tu Bi-Shevat: A Mid-Winter Spring Celebration



January 25, 1986: How many of us when this date comes, will associate it with spring and the regeneration of the earth? Probably not many, as most people usually associate the end of January with wrapping themselves up in a desperate attempt to keep warm. Why not, though, take a break from winter's icy tentacles by participating in a joyous Tu Bi-Shevat, the Jewish New Year of the Trees?

Tu Bi-Shivat is an ancient agrarian holiday, reflecting how our ancestors lived in close harmony with the cycles of nature. According to Jewish law, eating from fruit trees was permitted only after the fifth year of planting, following the fruit's being consecrated in the fourth. The fifteenth day of Shevat was settled upon as the legal "birthday" of all trees. Customs associated today with the holiday are recent innovations with 16th and 17th century mystic Kabbalists. They encouraged the eating of the fruits of Israel as an expression of longing for the Jewish homeland, and even created a Tu Bi-Shevat Seder. This special ceremony calls for a table set in festive white, lit by candles and complemented by the fragrances of myrtle leaves and flowers. Four cups of wine and blessings over

a variety of fruits are all part of this Seder.

Tu Bi-Shevat signals the coming of spring in Israel, a time when the rains have let up and the flowers are making their debut on the hillsides and the almond trees. Tu Bi-Shevat celebrations began in Israel on the 19th day of Tevat, which this year fell on December 31, and will continue through January 26, during the month of Shevat. The first day of the celebrations also marked the 84th birthday of the Jewish National Fund, the organization responsible for afforestation and land reclamation in Israel. The celebrations began with a central tree-planting ceremony on the shoreline of the Sea of Galilee. Educators later held a symposium on the working of the land with JNF leaders and government officials.

1985 Saw Lowest-Ever Number Of Immigrants To Israel

JERUSALEM (WNS) — Only 11,298 newcomers came to Israel in 1985, the lowest-ever annual figure. This figure includes 2,035 immigrants from Ethiopia.

The previous all-time low was 1983, when 11,326 immigrants arrived in Israel.

The 1985 figure reflected a drop in immigration from Rumania from 1,950 in 1984 to 1,330 last year. Western European immigration was down to 2,343 from 2,958, and Latin American aliya was down from 2,853 to 1,563.

During Tu Bi-Shevat, 200,000 schoolchildren, teachers, Ethiopian immigrants, and Israelis from all walks of life are expected to plant tree saplings at 40 JNF sites from the Golan Heights in the North to Eilat in the South. Including among the many festivities are major ceremonies to be held in JNF forests with government ministers and Knesset members. In major municipalities, shopping malls will feature JNF carnival-style displays of forest furniture. On the eve of Tu Bi-Shevat, a gala community sing-a-long, including a program on afforestation with JNF world chairman Moshe Rivlin, will be broadcast live over Voice of Israel.

In America, Jews all over the country participate in Tu Bi-Shevat celebrations by contributing towards JNF-sponsored tree-planting activities and fulfilling the ancient mitzvah of creating new life on Israel's sacred soil. Children

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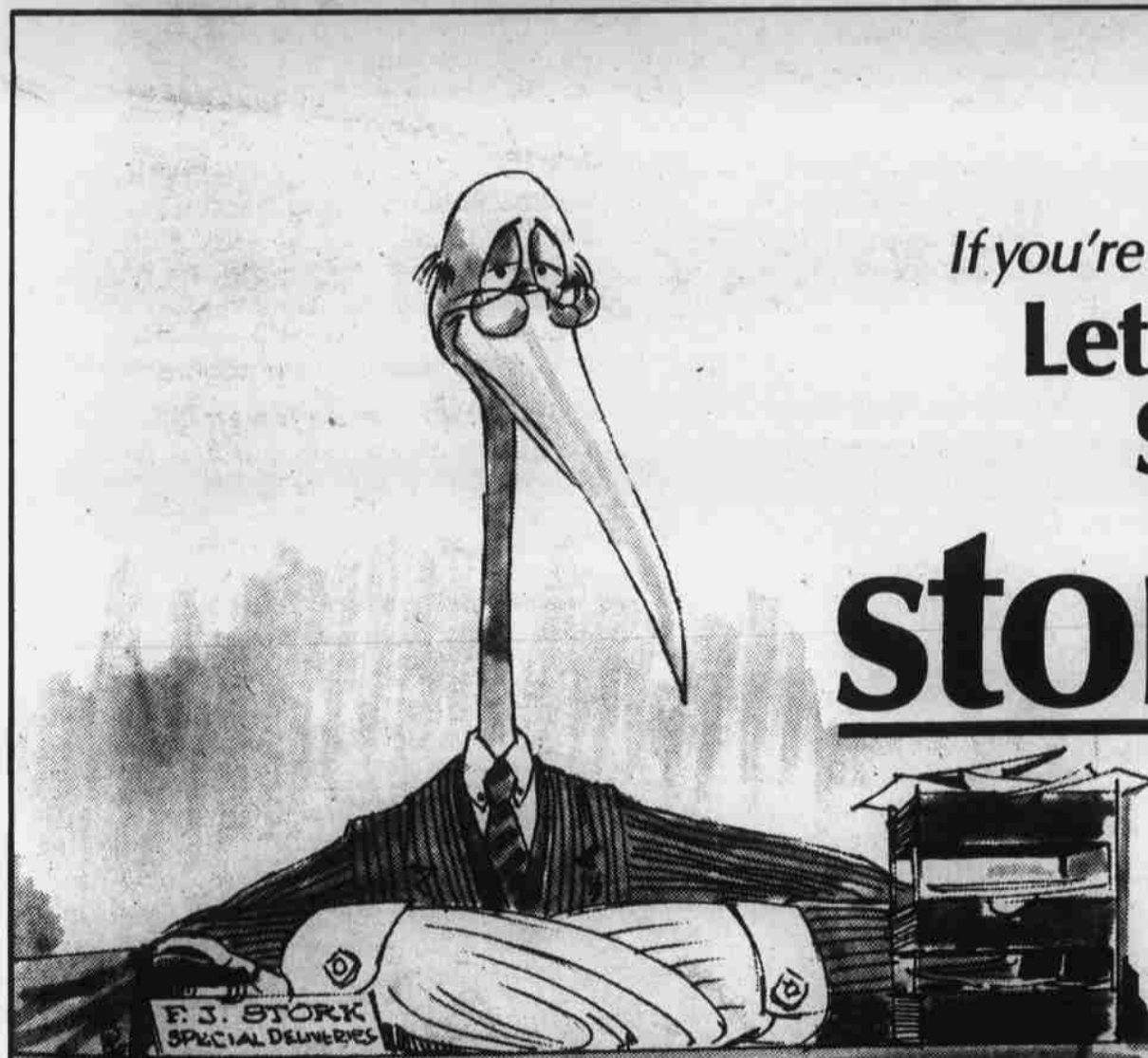
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